



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

Third Sunday of Ordinary Time A



The Calling of Saint Peter and Saint Andrew, James Tissot; 1886-1894



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

God of My Life

Only in love can I find you, my God.

In love the gates of my soul spring open,
allowing me to breathe a new air of freedom
and forget my own petty self.

In love my whole being streams forth
out of the rigid confines of narrowness and anxious self-assertion,
which makes me a prisoner of my own poverty and emptiness.
In love all the powers of my soul flow out toward you,
wanting never more to return,
but to lose themselves completely in you,
since by your love you are the inmost center of my heart,
closer to me than I am to myself.

But when I love you,
when I manage to break out of the narrow circle of self
and leave behind the restless agony of unanswered questions,
when my blinded eyes no longer look merely from afar
and from the outside upon your unapproachable brightness,
and much more when you yourself, O Incomprehensible One,
have become through love the inmost center of my life,
then I can bury myself entirely in you, O mysterious God,
and with myself all my questions. [Karl Rahner, SJ] ¹

**Catholic
Faith, Life
& Creed**
Version 2.0

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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Published cooperatively by
TeamRCIA.com and
PastoralPlanning.com.

¹ Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton at Church of our Lady of the Rosary.

Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today begins Jesus' ministry in Galilee.
- ▶ We now begin to hear the story of Jesus from the evangelist Matthew. It will take thirty three weeks for him to tell the story of Christ's life, passion, death and resurrection.
- ▶ Just as Jesus called Peter and Andrew to be fishers of people, so too he calls us to be his disciples and to go out and be fishers of people.
- ▶ Paul challenges the lack of cohesiveness in the Corinthian community. It is a challenge to communities everywhere and in every generation to cast aside all division and work toward the unity that Jesus mandated—"Father, that they all may be one as you and I are one."

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings. (You may want to concentrate on the Gospel alone.)

First reading: Isaiah 8: 23-9:3

- ▶ Israel is at the brink of defeat. It is feared the northern kingdom will be annihilated and that the southern kingdom of Judah would similarly fall to defeat.
- ▶ Isaiah brings hope in the midst of darkness and despair.
- ▶ He insists that darkness will vanish and the light will prevail.
- ▶ Feasting, not famine will prevail.
- ▶ An abundant harvest will prevail.
- ▶ Naphtali and Zebulon were defeated. Isaiah blamed their defeat on the unfaithfulness of the people of Israel. He insisted that God was punishing them for their failure to live the covenant.
- ▶ Today's reading echoes the reading from Isaiah at Midnight Mass. Christians believe Jesus is that Light that has come to overcome the darkness.
- ▶ We are still in proximity to the Christmas feasts of God's manifestation.
- ▶ The Light has shown and that Light is Christ. We are not to forget.
- ▶ Jesus freed all people from slavery and bondage to sin.
- ▶ Jesus brings hope and consolation to a broken, suffering, sorrow-filled world.
- ▶ Throughout salvation history images of light and darkness and harvest have been associated with good and evil and salvation and annihilation.
- ▶ Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies.
- ▶ He is the Light who dispels the darkness.
- ▶ Jesus is author of life; he conquered death forever.
- ▶ Jesus is the face of the living God. He upholds life, he does not destroy it.
- ▶ Jesus came into the world to bring God's own gift of salvation.
- ▶ He is everything Isaiah said he would be—and more.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface brief insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What is the lesson in this reading? How could this possibly be a word for us today?
- ▶ When there are so many indicators that Christ is the long awaited Messiah, why or how do you suppose that those who should have recognized him did not? What is the lesson in that for us?
- ▶ In what way, if any, has God saved you?

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1, 10-13, 17

- ▶ Paul was kept abreast of the happenings in his beloved Corinthian community.
- ▶ Chloe and others wrote to him to keep him informed.
- ▶ He wrote letters to the Corinthian community exhorting them to be of one mind and heart—to live in harmony with one another.
- ▶ Paul was frustrated with those who understood Christianity to simply be an intellectual exercise.
- ▶ He railed against the influences of Gnosticism and those who believed they possessed superior spiritual powers.
- ▶ Paul chastised his beloved Corinthians with a dose of gentleness and harshness.
- ▶ For Paul, participation in the cross of Christ is the only theology worthy of attention. All other philosophies are a waste of time.
- ▶ The cross was, in truth, not to be reduced to a philosophical ideology. The cross is to be lived, reflected upon and made the heart and center of Christian life. Anything that detracts from the cross and worship of Jesus Christ crucified is an outrage and must be avoided.
- ▶ Divisiveness in the community was another issue Paul addressed.
- ▶ Cliques were formed; some people were included others were excluded. The various cliques claimed to be under the auspices of some great Church leader.
- ▶ Paul would have none of it. He reminded them that allegiance to Christ and to God is all that mattered. Allegiance to human leaders is a waste of time and energy and is an affront to their baptism.
- ▶ Christians are baptized into the life of Christ—not some religious, human leader.
- ▶ Paul upheld the importance of unity in the community. When disunity prevailed, the Body of Christ was not in unity with itself. This simply was unacceptable.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, surface brief insights in wider group.

- ▶ What happens in your community when cliques are formed and disunity emerges? Why is Paul so insistent that harmony must be preserved?
- ▶ In what way, if any, do you participate in efforts to bring unity to your community? In what way are you an obstacle?
- ▶ What might you do to bring unity in the face of cliques and divisiveness? What can one person do?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that the cross is not to be reduced to an intellectual philosophy, it is to be lived?
- ▶ How do you live the cross of Christ?

Gospel: Matthew 4: 12-23

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
- ▶ Matthew is the only evangelist that relates Jesus' move from Nazareth to Capernaum.
- ▶ This is significant for several reasons. It is first important to consider his intended audience—Jewish Christians. Such Christians were not only be converted to Christ but everything associated with Judaism was intrinsically part of their lives. Matthew's community did not necessarily turn its back on Judaism. They were still intimately connected to the synagogue; they did not think of themselves as separated and cut off from Judaism. They were Christians within the context of Judaism.
- ▶ Secondly, Capernaum signaled the inauguration of Jesus' Galilean ministry.
- ▶ Galilee was hated by the Jews of Jerusalem. The region was a melting pot that included people from many diverse backgrounds. Jews and pagans co-existed as neighbors in close proximity with one another. As such, Jews feared ritual impurity for coming in contact with pagans and thus looked upon Galilee with scorn.
- ▶ It is important to note that Biblical prophecy places the appearance of the Messiah and the inauguration of the Messianic mission in Galilee. Matthew even quotes

Isaiah, thus hinting at the universality of Jesus' mission. Jesus would extend his mission beyond Israel to the whole world.

- ▶ The death of the Baptist and the inauguration of Jesus' ministry signal a move from the world of ancient Palestine to a new cultural and religious world order—more simplistically it signals a move from the Old Testament to the world of the New.
- ▶ Jesus is the Light that will illumine a darkened world.
- ▶ Jesus does not repudiate Israel and Judaism. He teaches what it means to be a true member of Israel—a child of God.
- ▶ Matthew always seeks to connect the present and future with what took place in the past. He honors the community's Jewish tradition. Jesus is its fulfillment.
- ▶ Jesus is sent to unite the people of Israel into God's loving embrace.
- ▶ Jesus is sent to be a Light to the world—a Light even to the Gentiles.
- ▶ Jesus is sent to establish God's reign on earth.
- ▶ Jesus picks up where John left off and calls for complete and total metanoia—not, however, because the Messiah is about to come—rather, it is because the reign of God had arrived and was in their midst. They were privy to the dawn of a new day—the last day—the last age—the final age.
- ▶ The kingdom of heaven, as Matthew describes it, is called the kingdom of heaven because it denotes God's sovereignty over the entire earth—God's heavenly powers have called this new kingdom into being. It is described also as *on the way*. It is God's gift to the world.
- ▶ God's rule was now inaugurated and God was their sovereign Lord and King. This was a great day for Israel and for the world.
- ▶ One can only understand the term *kingdom* in relation to the subjugation and oppression experienced by Roman imperial power.
- ▶ Imperial Rome levied huge taxes on the people and as oppressors made life extremely difficult. The people longed for God's sovereign kingdom—one in which God's justice would rule.
- ▶ The people did not understand the term *kingdom of heaven* to mean that all would go to heaven to be in God's kingdom. No, it was understood as God's sovereign kingdom here on earth—a kingdom ruled with justice—ruled in a way that human beings failed to do.
- ▶ Israel imagined and longed for God's kingdom to come now and in this place.
- ▶ The kingdom was a means to an end—it was to bring about God's salvation. It was intended to change their insufferable situation.
- ▶ The term kingdom of God also expressed a theology of God. God cared for his people—God was concerned with their health and welfare.
- ▶ Christ by extension presented God's kingdom when he healed the people of sickness and delivered them from the power of evil.
- ▶ The kingdom of God was understood to usher in the last age, the end of days, the eschatological reign of God.
- ▶ The last age and the final kingdom signaled an end of suffering, tears would subside, death would pass away and the final promise of God for humanity would be fulfilled.

- ▶ The kingdom of God evoked the biblical image of *People of God*—a sign of God’s presence. It evoked community; this was not an individualist’s enterprise.
- ▶ Jesus teaches us about the kingdom by his words and his actions.
- ▶ The *kingdom of God* is not only a reality, it is also a symbol. There are several kinds of symbols—a steno symbol and a tensive symbol. A steno symbol has one meaning—a stop sign is a steno symbol. It means STOP. A tensive symbol has many meanings. *Kingdom of God* in Scripture is a tensive symbol. It has many meanings and the layers of meaning continuously unfold.

Call of Peter and Andrew

- ▶ Evidence does not support the supposition that Peter and Andrew were poor fisherman. The fishing industry was a profitable enterprise. Partnerships were formed; it has thus been suggested that Peter and Andrew were from middle class to upper middle class families.
- ▶ When the Scripture tells us that they left everything, what it probably meant is that during the day they went to the regions across the Sea of Galilee (the size of a formidable lake) and the environs nearby and then returned to their families at night.
- ▶ *Leaving everything* was understood more in terms of an interior attitude—the attitude all disciples must possess--detachment from everything that would get in the way of one’s Christian life.
- ▶ Andrew and Peter remind every Christian of their God-given duty—to leave behind—to be detached from all life’s concerns and respond to God’s call in one’s life.
- ▶ Jesus calls for complete metanoia—a complete turning of one’s life to God--an acceptance of God’s love—a turning away from all obstacles that would get in the way of that love.
- ▶ A common practice in Judaism was for students to seek out a master and follow that master and what he taught about the Law until they learned all they could from him. Such students would then seek out a different master and the cycle would continue repeatedly.
- ▶ Jesus turns that custom on end. Today Jesus seeks his own students; they belong to him and are attached to him forever. He insists upon their complete loyalty. Rather than studying the Torah, their focus would now be to fish for God’s people—to haul in the big catch—to bring people into the kingdom of God.
- ▶ Andrew and Peter, icons for all future disciples, are to go out and bring in new fish. They are to feed the hungry, minister to the poor, bring Good News to the oppressed, comfort the sorrowful and place Christ at the center of their being.
- ▶ The joy they bring to this endeavor is to be contagious and extends to the entire world for all future generations.
- ▶ Today’s gospel is a significant, awe-inspiring inauguration of the mission Christ came to accomplish.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example.

- ▶ What is the primary message of this Gospel?
- ▶ Imagine how difficult it must have been to reach out to Gentiles and pagans in Jesus' culture. What correlation can be made today? Who would it be difficult to minister to in our culture?
- ▶ How does the kingdom Jesus came to establish differ from the way Judaism was organized? In what way does the church today embody Jesus' vision of the kingdom? In what way does it fall short?
- ▶ Do you remember when God called you? Describe your Christian calling ever since? What does God want from you? What gifts do you bring to the kingdom?
- ▶ In what way are you called to be fishers of people? It is the call of baptism. Have you ever fished for another person? What are the obstacles to doing so?
- ▶ Think of the best examples of a Peter and an Andrew that you can imagine from your own life. What have they taught you about what it means to be a disciple?
- ▶ What do you need to detach from in order to grow as a disciple of Christ? What gets in the way of your relationship with Jesus? What do you need to leave behind?

Concluding Prayer

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97

Appendix

I often wondered why Jews missed Jesus as the Messiah. I once asked a rabbi. He told me that Jews believe Jesus was a great prophet of God, but he was not the Messiah. The Messiah was to usher in a time of peace and tranquility—all creation would exist in harmony. There has never been a time when war was absent from the world stage. Thus, insisted the rabbi, Jesus could not have been the Messiah. Also, the prophets foretold the rebuilding of the Temple. It has not been rebuilt. Thus, Jesus could not have been the Messiah.

I have often reflected upon what this rabbi told me. Indeed the world has always known war. However, whenever two or more are gathered in Jesus' name and are truly living the Gospel he preached, then the peace of Eden, the harmony intended for the creation of the world has indeed been realized. When that happens we are living in and establishing Christ's kingdom in our midst.

As per the Temple, Jesus told us that he is the new Temple. He has given us the new and restored Temple in his Body, the Church. It was restored by his Spirit and we are living within its confines.

I can understand why Jews missed the truth of who we believe Jesus was and is. It is God's job to work all those things out for the good. He is the God of the Jew, the Greek, the Christian, the Muslim, the pagan and the atheist—all of the people of the earth. Jesus is the Messiah who came to save the world—who indeed has saved me and continues to save me each and every day. Isaiah so clearly foreshadowed his coming. Christians such as Andrew and Peter were opened enough to God's prompting to accept him, embrace him as Lord and become his disciples. I am thankful to be part of that heritage.

2. I am called to be a fisher of people by sharing the witness of God's action in my life and the lives of those with whom I live, work, pray and play. People are weary of the televangelist brand of witness. They are suspicious of those who hypocritically speak of their love of God in one breath and then in another breath stand in absolute hatred and condemnation of God's children. I ran across a prayer that cuts through the hypocrisy and invites us to be the disciples that Andrew and Peter have shown us how to be—authentic witnesses of the truth.

This prayer was offered by minister Joe Wright at the opening session of the Kansas Senate. Some people were so upset by it that they walked out. It gives us serious grist for reflection. It is the call of discipleship—the call of serious metanoia—the call to turn away from all that is not of God and turn toward the Light who is God.

“Heavenly Father,
We come before you today to ask your forgiveness and to seek your direction and guidance.
We know Your Word says, "Woe to those who call evil good",
but that is exactly what we have done.
We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and reversed our values.
We confess that:
We have ridiculed the absolute truth of Your Word and called it Pluralism.
We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery,
We have killed our unborn and called it choice,
We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable,
We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self-esteem,
We have abused power and called it politics.
We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it ambition,
We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of speech,
We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment.
To this I would add:
We say we are right to life, yet we are the first to call for the death penalty.
We say we love all God's children, yet we foster hate toward the immigrant, Muslims, and all
who are different than ourselves.
We say we are Christian, yet we demand a legalistic observance of the Law that trumps love of
God and love of neighbor.
We say we care for the poor and disadvantaged, yet we ignore them, judge them as lazy and
promote systems and structures that help keep them poor.
Search us, Oh, God, and know our hearts today; cleanse us from every sin and set us free.
Guide and bless all who have been sent to direct us to the center of your will.
We openly ask these things in the name of Your Son, the living Savior, Jesus Christ.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Faith
Kingdom of God
Evangelization
Holy Orders
Liturgical Year

Jesus Christ
Revelation I or II
Salvation/Soteriology
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

FAITH

Isaiah offers hope and encouragement to a people on the brink of despair. Paul railed against the people in his community who tried to make their Christian faith a mere intellectual exercise (the influence of Gnosticism). Matthew's Gospel heralds Christ as the true Messiah, the one who would unite Israel. Faith in God's salvific power and his salvific plan through Christ is a common thread in today's liturgy. It is thus most appropriate that we focus our doctrinal attention on what the Church teaches about FAITH.

KINGDOM OF GOD

Today Matthew's intention is to herald Jesus who is the long awaited Messiah. He begins his ministry in Galilee to establish the kingdom of God, God's great salvific enterprise that was to take place in the last age. Jesus inaugurates the fulfillment of that promise. Thus, it is a most appropriate occasion to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the KINGDOM OF GOD.

EVANGELIZATION

In today's Gospel Jesus calls his first disciples. He inaugurates his Galilean mission and creates the first school of evangelization. He teaches his disciples firsthand what it means to proclaim the Good News to the people—the hallmark of the reign of God. It is thus a most appropriate time for us to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about EVANGELIZATION.

HOLY ORDERS

Jesus chooses those who will be leaders in the kingdom he came to establish. From the very beginning he envisioned a kingdom in which the leaders he chose would take his Gospel out to the world. Those original leaders were called apostles. The hierarchy of the Church today can be traced to those first roots. Clergy are ordained by the sacrament of Holy Orders. It is thus an appropriate time to address the doctrinal issue of the sacrament of HOLY ORDERS.

LITURGICAL YEAR

In these early days of the liturgical year and Jesus' public ministry, it is a most appropriate time to address what we celebrate in the unfolding liturgical cycle. The entire mystery of Christ from his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension to the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit is manifested in one complete liturgical year. It is thus most appropriate as the early days of the new liturgical year begin that we address what the Church teaches about the LITURGICAL YEAR.

JESUS CHRIST

Matthew heralds Jesus the long awaited Messiah, the one who would fulfill all the prophecies about the *One Who Is to Come*. Jesus begins the work of establishing the kingdom of God—he inaugurates the mission for which he was sent. It is thus most appropriate that we focus our attention on him—who is he? What do we believe about him? Thus today we will focus our attention on JESUS CHRIST.

REVELATION I or II

Every Sunday is an appropriate time to focus our attention on God's manifestation to the world through Sacred Scripture. Today's Scriptures recall the prophecies of Isaiah who foretold the future Messiah. We hear Matthew tell us about Jesus' inauguration of his Galilean ministry. God speaks to us through his Word and reminds of us the God/human relationship since the beginning of time. The echoes of salvation history in today's liturgy is an appropriate time for us to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about REVELATION

SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY

Jesus inaugurates his Galilean ministry in today's gospel. The kingdom of God of the last age is underway. God's plan of salvation is unfolding and we are given a front row seat. It is thus a most appropriate time for us to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.